

# VOICES IN THE DESERT

## LEARNING FROM ENGAGEMENT

### WITH TWO BEDOUIN

### COMMUNITIES IN THE ISRAELI

### NEGEV REGION

Photograph by Matthew Parker,  
(Wikimedia Commons)

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for Sustainability



**אמנ"ה** אשנב למחקר נגיש לקהילה

مدخل لإشراك الجمهور في الأبحاث

Gateway to Community Engaged Research



כי חכרת הידע צריכה אמנה חברתית



*Living Knowledge*  
The International Science Shop Network



**PERARES**  
Public engagement with research  
and research engagement with society



## Partners

- The Living Knowledge Network, with EC (FP7) funding through the PERARES project
- The Israeli project 'Gateway to Community Engaged Research', hosted by the Heschel Center for Sustainability
- The Department of Politics and Government at the Ben Gurion University in the Negev, with funding from the Council for Higher Education.



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Gateway to Community Engaged Research



כי הקרת הידע זריכה אמנה הקרתית



# Background

- 🌐 Limited community engagement with research in Israel, particularly in the fields of environment, health and sustainability
- 🌐 Existing models of academy-community cooperation (law clinics, courses, planning labs, internships, 'activist researchers')
- 🌐 But, not always suited to community needs, no formalised structure (courses, activist researchers), mostly limited to academic year, lack of funding, no acknowledgment for academics involved or academic accreditation for student's work in the community, sustainability issues.



# Science-in-Society Call 2008

- Structuring Public Engagement in Research
- Science Communication: From ‘transmission’ to ‘interaction’ (‘understanding’ → ‘engagement’)
- *...engagement that will make a difference to research strategies...*
- *...broadest European coverage...*

→ PERARES: 26 partners, 17 countries, 4 years,  
EC-Grant 2.7 Million Euro



# The Negev Region

‘Ha-negev’, Al-Naqab

12,500 km<sup>2</sup>, 60% of the territory of Israel but only 8% of the population.

Arid and semi-arid climate

Periphery of Israel

Local municipalities low on most socio-economic indicators

Bedouin about 25-30% of the population.



Ramon Crater (Wikimedia Commons)



Aerial view of the development town of Yeruham, created by Amos Meron (Wikimedia Commons)

Top photo by Ester Inbar (Wikimedia Commons)

# The Bedouin in the Negev

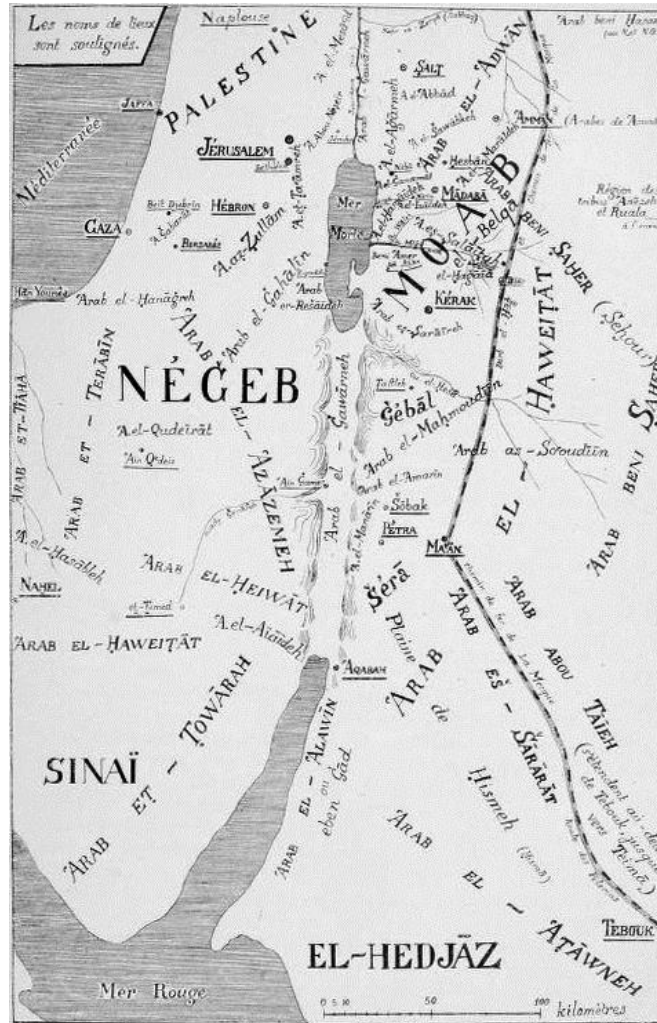
Bedouin have settled in the Negev desert for several centuries.

Traditionally a  
pastoral, semi-nomadic  
people who cycled  
their land settling near  
water sources.

Limits to their autonomy start in 19th & 20th century.

## Map showing the Bedouin tribes around 1908.

Source: Father Antonin Jaussen "Les coutumes des Arabs au Pays de Moab" ["Arab customs in the Land of Moab") published in Paris in 1908.



Source: lehava Rahat (Pikiwiki)



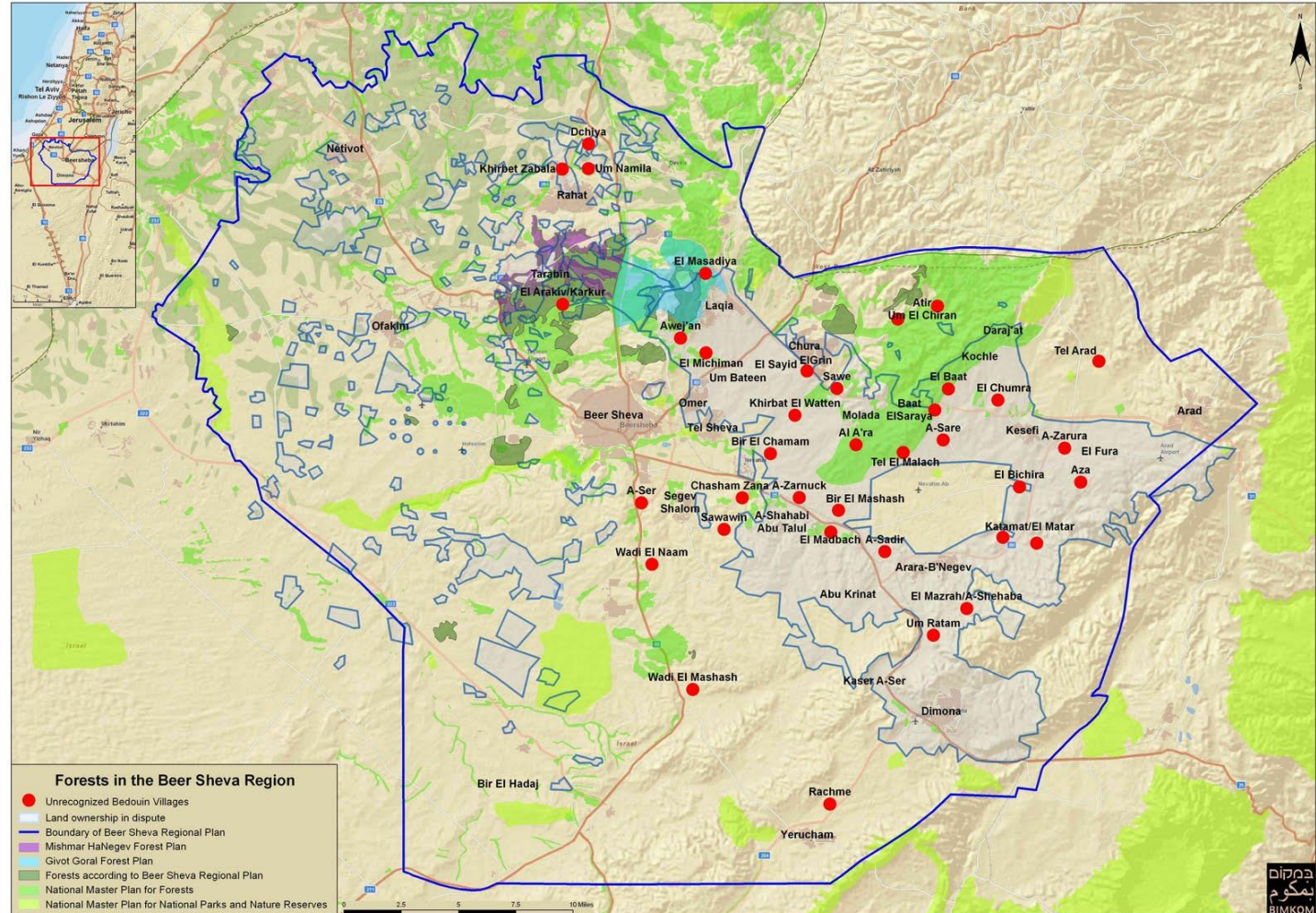
Traditional Bedouin camel race in the Negev desert, near Arad, Israel.  
Photograph by Shy Halatzi  
(Wikimedia Commons)



# Conflict with the State

Since 1948 the Bedouin are in conflict with the Israeli state over land rights and traditional vs. modern settlements.

## Problem of 'unrecognised settlements'.





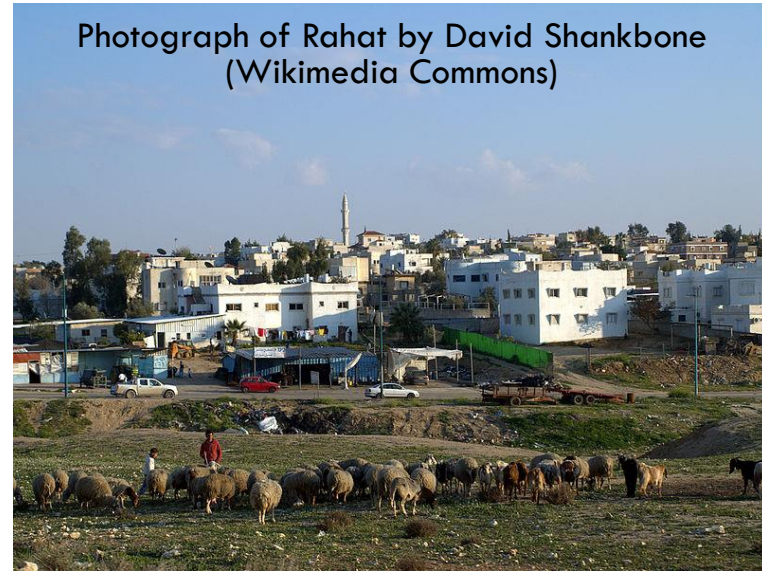
# Conflict with the State

1960s-80s – first attempt at resettlement (7 Bedouin towns founded)

2004 – A regional council created with a limited recognition of settlements.

2008 to present – various plans for resettlement.

Photograph of Rahat by David Shankbone  
(Wikimedia Commons)



Demolished house in the unrecognized Bedouin village of Alsara, January 2008, Photograph by Neukoln (Wikimedia Commons)





# The Bedouin in the Negev

Currently: 191,000 in the Negev, of which 120,000 in towns, 66,000 in unrecognised settlements and 5000 in the Abu Basma regional council.

The Bedouin population is consistently at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.



Qasr A-Sir, photograph by Meira Hanson



## High tension wire in Tel Sheva

Examining the potential health effects of living in near proximity to a high tension wire in the Bedouin municipality of Tel Sheva

Photograph by Eliad Tamir



# Tel Sheva

Founded in 1969,  
the first of 7  
towns in the  
Israeli  
government's  
urban  
resettlement of  
the Bedouin.

At the bottom of  
the national  
municipal socio-  
economic ladder.



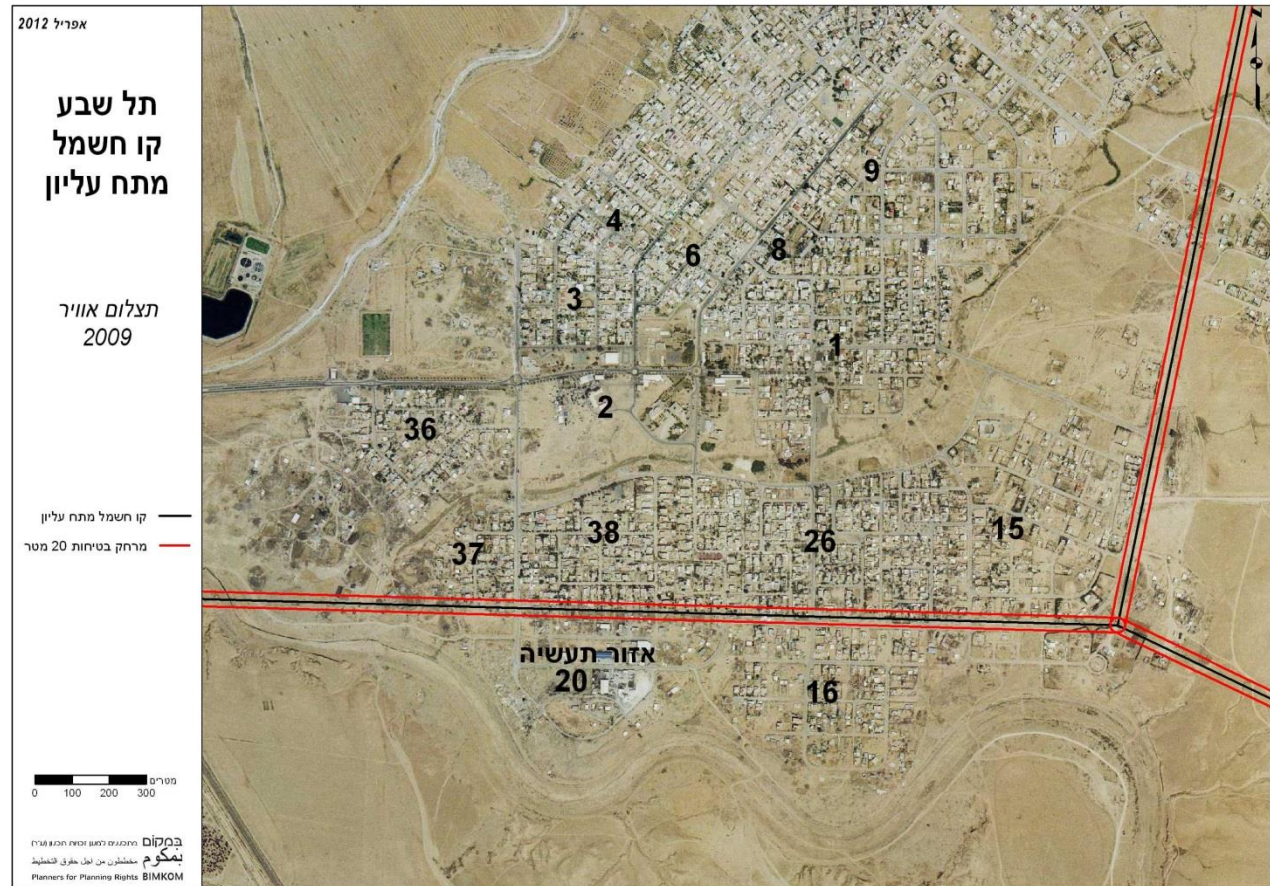
Photograph by Gilabrand (Wikimedia Commons)

# High tension wire in Tel Sheva

A 161 kw high tension wire (HTW) crosses the town's southern neighbourhoods for 1.9 km.

A local plan authorised housing despite conflict with rules about proximity to HTWs.

Locals concerned about health effects of exposure.











- Project initiated with a professor of public health at Ben Gurion University, affiliated with Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)
- Information gathered over 2 years by:
  - 2 students in a course on planning and human rights
  - A student interning at PHR
  - 2 students in the course 'Clinic: a right to health and environmental justice'
- Locals assisted with introductions and translation.



# Results

Out of 46 households within an est. 20m proximity of the HTW 31 were surveyed.

Findings: no statistically significant excess in morbidity and mortality from cancer or abortions that might be attributed to the HTW.

**Next steps:  
legal and/or  
political  
action**



# CLINIC: THE RIGHT TO HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Review of environmental  
health hazards in the Bedouin  
village Qasr A-Sir





# Qasr A-Sir

Recognised by the  
Israeli government  
in 2003

Part of the Abu-  
Basma regional  
council

Prioritised for  
infrastructure  
development

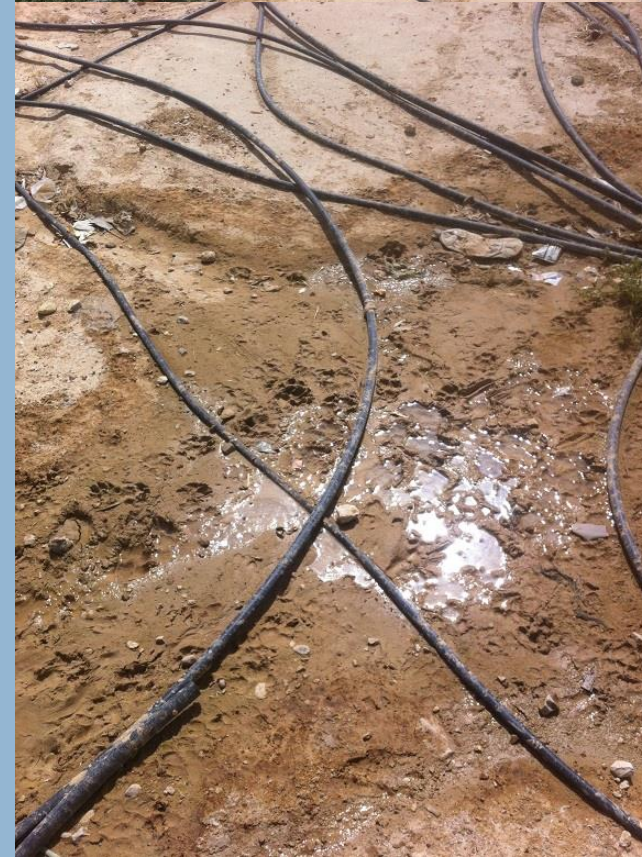
Issues of  
development from  
above/below



Source: lehava Rahat  
(Pikiwiki)



# Access to Water









# Sewage treatment



A septic tank in Qasr





# The project

Report  
'commissioned'  
by 'Bustan' on  
environmental  
health hazards in  
the village,  
including a  
survey of the  
population's  
rating of the  
hazards.

Photographs from  
[www.bustan.org](http://www.bustan.org)

Women  
Entrepreneurship



'Qasr' Eco Khan



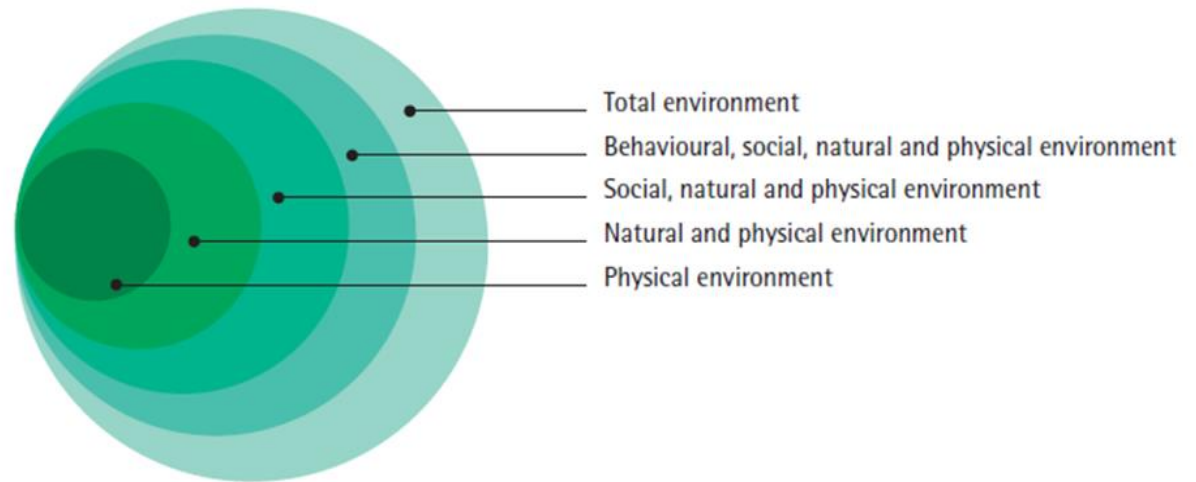
**Bustan: Sustainable Community Action for Land and People** is an NGO that works in the Bedouin and Jewish communities of the Negev. Through analysis, education, and action, it is the mission of Bustan to work for fair resource allocation, as well as social and environmental justice for all peoples in the region.

# The project

*The environment is all the physical, chemical and biological factors external to the human host, and all related behaviours, but excluding those natural environments that cannot reasonably be modified.*

This definition excludes behaviour not related to environment, as well as behaviour related to the social and cultural environment, genetics, and parts of the natural environment.

**FIGURE 1** DEFINITION OF THE ENVIRONMENT <sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> (Adapted from Smith, Corvalán and Kjellström, 1999)

The students & course coordinator developed a questionnaire based on definitions studied in class and a review of the existing literature as well as an interview with the village's head.

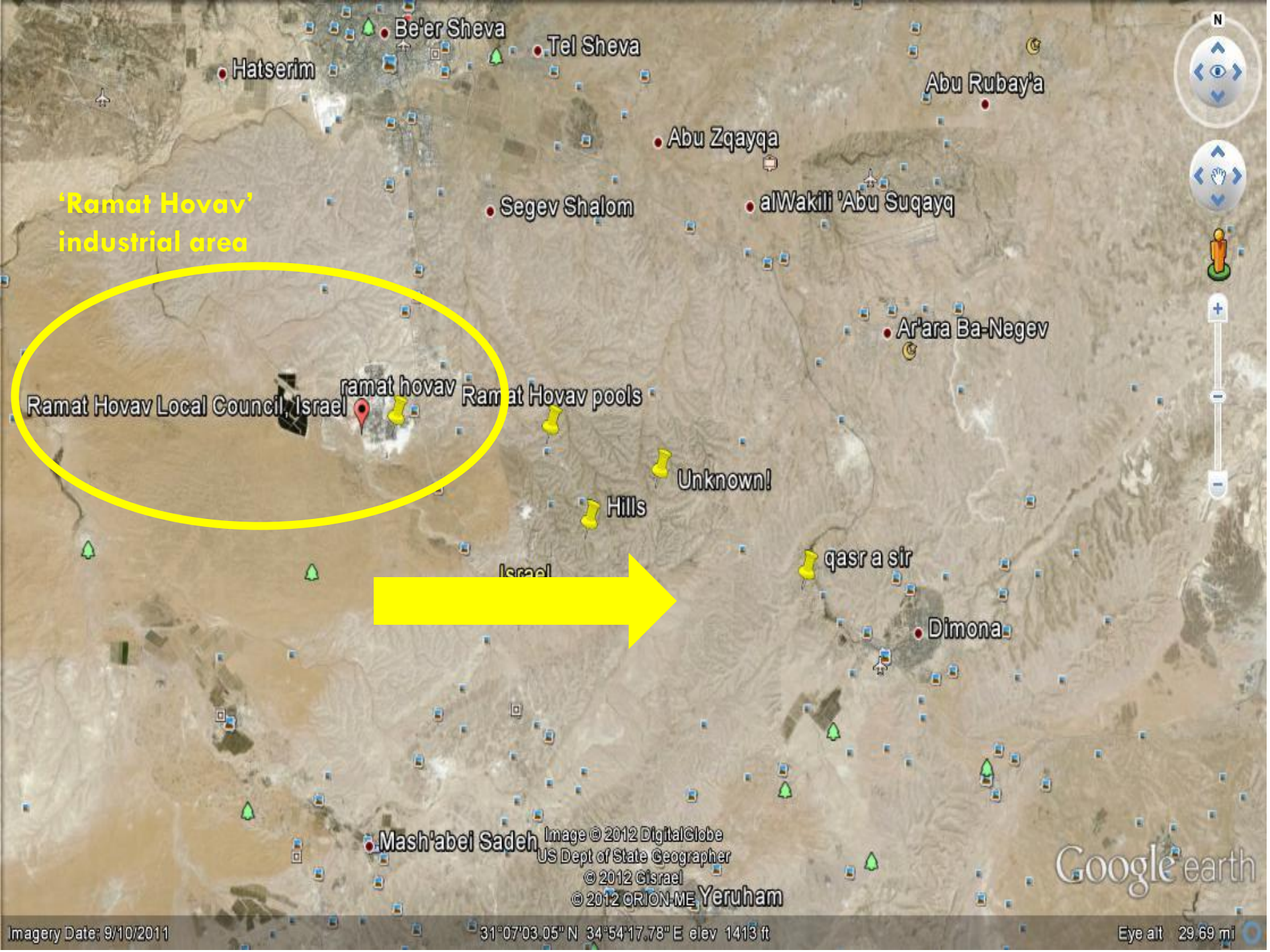




# The Dimona River







'Ramat Hovav'  
industrial area

Ramat Hovav Local Council, Israel

ramat hovav

Ramat Hovav pools

Hills

Unknown!

qasr a sir

Dimona

Mash'abei Sadeh

Image © 2012 DigitalGlobe  
US Dept of State Geographer

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Google earth





# Results

Due to local cultural issues (men working with a female translator) and local politics (involving different extended families) only 20 residents were surveyed in the time available and the results were not statistically significant.



מספר המרואיינים במדגם: א' - 10; ב' - 3; ג' - 2; ד' - 3; ה' - 7



# Achievements

## Tel Sheva

- A mapping of the majority of the homes near the HTW.
- Issues identified other than mortality and morbidity (effects on quality of life, animal husbandry, etc.)
- Local awareness to the issue.

## Qasr Al-Sir

- A provisional description of local health hazards.
- A questionnaire that can be used in other Bedouin villages.
- A potential local initiative to organise locally on the Dimona River situation.

A hands-on learning experience for the students involved

# Problems encountered

## Tel Sheva

- Language barriers
- Cultural issues influenced the information gathering and (probably) the results
- Local politics somewhat influenced the information gathering
- Researcher's time constraints

## Qasr Al-Sir

- Language barriers
- Cultural differences significantly influenced the information gathering
- Local politics significantly influenced the information gathering
- Lack of contact in the local community



# Lessons learned

1. Work with a community group or a community based organisation
2. Work with an organisation that has the capacity to participate in the project (may conflict with the above)
3. Match methods used to cultural context
4. Identify alternative methods for collecting information in future Bedouin-Jewish research partnerships
5. A student project must be for at least an academic year
6. Try adapt the course to the project rather than the project to the course
7. Structural: academic incentives for the researchers involved.

**Long term funding!!!**



# Participants

## Ben Gurion University

Prof. Nadav Davidovitch, Dept. of Health Systems Management

Prof. Dani Filc, Dept. of Politics and Government

Dr. Eran Tzin, Dept. of Politics and Government

Oren Shlomo, Dept. of Politics and Government

### Students:

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## The Heschel Center

Meira Hanson (also coordinator of the course 'Clinic: the right to health and Environmental justice' at Ben Gurion University)

## Tel Sheva

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Hamdan Al-Asem

Maha Abu-Rqaiq

Nimer Abu-Raqaiq

## Qasr A-Sir

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Gazza Al-Hawashla

Atiya Al-Hawashla

## Physicians for Human Rights

Itamar Inbari

Niv Michaeli

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רופאים לזכויות אדם - ישראל (ע"ר)

أطباء لحقوق الإنسان-إسرائيل

Physicians For Human Rights - Israel

## Bustan

Alon Shepon





# Thank you for you attention!

Photograph by Matthew Parker,  
(Wikimedia Commons)